

# ISAIAH

## ISAIAH 57:5, INTRODUCTION TO IDOLATRY

These verses, Isaiah 57:5-10, reveal the depth of the pagan depravity that had been embraced by the nation. This is not just a characteristic of Israel. The entire world, with the exception of the few born-again believers living at any one time, has rejected God and embraced pagan worship practices in one form or another since at least the Tower of Babel, if not since the Fall itself. This is a good place in the book of Isaiah to conduct an in-depth examination of idolatry and the nation's participation in it.

Romans 1:22–25 <sup>22</sup>Professing to be wise, they [mankind] became fools, <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. <sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup>For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The Israelites rebelled against God in every possible way; fertility cults were not the only pagan issue in which the Israelites engaged. Other idolatrous pursuits are identified in the Old Testament. Immediately before the destruction of Judah by Babylon, Ezekiel received a vision of the various idolatrous practices taking place in the Temple including fertility cult worship.

Ezekiel 8:10, 16 <sup>10</sup>So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.... <sup>16</sup>Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.

In the Temple itself, the priests were worshiping many facets of the creation just like every pagan nation worshiped them. They worshiped the sun, and the possession of crescent jewelry or other crescent ornamentation (Judges 8:21, 26; Is. 3:18) indicated they worshiped the moon as well. They worshiped various aspects of the created order, "creeping things and beasts."

Idolatry was an especially egregious offense against the God who created Israel to be a people and a nation serving Him as His agent of revelation to the world (Ex. 19:6). The command to worship Yahweh alone and to refrain from idolatry, which is the opposite of worshiping Yahweh alone, was at the top of the list among the commands given to Israel.

Exodus 20:3–5 <sup>3</sup>"You shall have no other gods before Me. <sup>4</sup>"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup>"You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

The things spoken of by the prophet Isaiah in verse 5, represent the practices of the mother/child fertility cult that is thought of have begun in Babylon with Nimrod, his wife, Semiramis, and their son Tammuz. This cult spread throughout the world; only the names of the pagan deities were changed from place to place.

Egypt:	Isis	Osiris
India:	Isi	Iswara
Asia:	Cybele	Deoius
Greece:	Ceres/Irene	Plutus
China:	Shing Moo	

What I am going to say now is my opinion; agree with it or not. It is not for use as a club to bludgeon people, but is intended to be background information so you know the mindset of people who may fall into the category I am identifying here. The most widespread, modern iteration of the mother/child cult is the Roman Catholic Church and their doctrine concerning Mariology. "The very name by which the Italians commonly designate the Virgin is just the translation of one of the titles of the Babylonian goddess. As Baal or Belus was the name of the great male divinity of Babylon, so the female divinity was called Beltis.... The Greek Belus, as representing the highest title of the Babylonian god, was undoubtedly Baal, 'The Lord.' Beltis, therefore, as the title of the female divinity, was equivalent to 'Baalti,' which, in English is 'My Lady,' in Latin 'Mea Domina,' and in Italian, is corrupted into the well-known 'Madonna'" [Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, 20]. If you know anything at all about the mother/child cult, you can't help but see the obvious connections with the original mother/child cult of Nimrod, Semiramis, and Tammuz. The Roman Catholics are well aware that Bible students make this connection, and they obviously do not like it, but the fact they do not like it does not negate the obvious similarities. If you read the history of all these false gods in all these diverse places, they are similar and they do appear to have a common root with common mother/child cult tenets among them.

Jeremiah identified the worship of the "queen of heaven" in his book (Jer. 7:18, 44:17-19, 25) which was condemned by God. The "queen of heaven" was the consort of Tammuz. The "queen of heaven" is also a title the Roman Catholic Church applies to Mary. I realize the Catholics believe they are venerating Mary, but the background to the title is very concerning.

Many people discredit Hislop's work because, they claim, it is poorly researched, and full of unsupported claims and accusations, but I do not think it is that simple. He has a lot of support for much of what he claims in the book. Everyone who reads Hislop's book should evaluate it as they go through it. A theologian named Ralph Woodrow wrote a very popular book based on Hislop's work, but later claimed to have invested more time in research and subsequently developed doubts about Hislop's work to the extent that he eventually pulled his book from the marketplace. You can read his explanation here: <https://www.equip.org/article/the-two-babylons/>, accessed 16 Feb. 2022.

"A fertility cult is a type of nature worship that attempts to safeguard the fertility or productivity of plants, animals, and people. Fertility cults usually focus on a certain deity,

and followers believe that by propitiating that god or goddess, fruitfulness will result. Fertility cults were common in ancient pagan religions, where certain rites were performed at certain times to ensure fertility and avoid drought and barrenness. Common rituals included the sacrifice of animals—and sometimes humans—as well as shrine prostitution. Evidence of fertility cults have been found throughout the world, including Egypt, the Americas, Europe, India, China, and the Middle East.... Although most fertility cults have died out with time, some elements are still found in smaller sects within religions such as Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism. Fertility rituals are still practiced today in some Wiccan and neo-pagan groups. Any teaching that personifies the earth and nature or that speaks of a 'mother goddess' is harking back to the ancient fertility cults" [<https://www.gotquestions.org/fertility-cults.html>], accessed February 15, 2022].

The Israelites were specifically commanded not to participate in these fertility cults.

Deuteronomy 16:21–22 <sup>21</sup>“You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of the LORD your God, which you shall make for yourself. <sup>22</sup>“You shall not set up for yourself a sacred pillar which the LORD your God hates.

The people of Israel were specifically commanded not to become cult prostitutes.

Deuteronomy 23:17 <sup>17</sup>“None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute.

But participate in the pagan fertility rituals, they did.

1 Kings 14:23–24 <sup>23</sup>For they [Judah] also built for themselves high places and *sacred* pillars and Asherim on every high hill and beneath every luxuriant tree. <sup>24</sup>There were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel.

Ezekiel 8:14 <sup>14</sup>Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD's house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom before it fell to Assyria. The issue of idolatry was one of the issues that led to the destruction of that nation. The fact that it was still a problem in Judah reveals that the Israelites in the Southern Kingdom learned nothing from their brethren's experience in the Northern Kingdom.

Hosea 4:12–14 <sup>12</sup>My people consult their wooden idol, and their *diviner's* wand informs them; For a spirit of harlotry has led *them* astray, And they have played the harlot, *departing* from their God. <sup>13</sup>They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains And burn incense on the hills, Under oak, poplar and terebinth, Because their shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters play the harlot And your brides commit adultery. <sup>14</sup>I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot Or your brides when they commit adultery, For *the men* themselves go apart with harlots And offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes; So the people without understanding are ruined.

The oak, poplar, and terebinth are trees relating to the high places where pagan worship practices were commonly performed. The high places were intended to be impressive in the sight of humans. Ziggurats such as the one constructed in Babylon were artificial hills or high places for pagan worship practices. These places would have an altar, a carved Asherah pole which represented the female goddess of fertility, a stone pillar representing a male deity, various other idols, a building with chambers for the cultic prostitution activities. Animals and humans, usually children, were sacrificed in these places.

Asherah, אֲשֵׁרָה, refers to a pagan goddess and to a pole carved to worship that goddess.

Adultery, נִאֲפָיִם, refers to that activity of sexual relations of a married or betrothed person with one who is not that partner. With this spelling, the word is referring to spiritual adultery of which physical, married adultery is the type. Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all used the concept of adultery to represent Israel's rejection of God in favor of idol worship.

"The seventh commandment requires sexual purity. This contrasts with the infidelity and promiscuity sanctioned and practiced by the official cultus of the rest of the ancient near east. The religion of Jehovah represents adultery as a heinous crime against God, man, and society: a breach of the marriage contract before God, a dishonor done to God by placing man's will above God's, a rebellious act done with deliberation ... [Harris, Archer, Jr., and Waltke, s.v. "נִאֲפָיִם," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 542].

Jeremiah 3:8–9 <sup>8</sup>"And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. <sup>9</sup>"Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees.

Ezekiel 23:37 <sup>37</sup>"For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through *the fire* to them as food.

As the various kings of Judah came to power over time, the faithful kings would destroy the high places, and the unfaithful kings would rebuild them. That was one of the actions used by Yahweh to evaluate the faithfulness, or not, of the various kings.

Asa, for example, was a righteous king who removed the high places and led the people to seek Yahweh.

2 Chronicles 14:1–5 <sup>1</sup>So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David, and his son Asa became king in his place. The land was undisturbed for ten years during his days. <sup>2</sup>Asa did good and right in the sight of the LORD his God, <sup>3</sup>for he removed the foreign altars and high places, tore down the *sacred* pillars, cut down the Asherim, <sup>4</sup>and commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers and to observe the law and the commandment. <sup>5</sup>He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah. And the kingdom was undisturbed under him.

Jehoram, on the other hand restored the high places and led the people into pagan worship practices.

2 Chronicles 21:11 <sup>11</sup>Moreover, he [Jehoram] made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot and led Judah astray.

The blessings and the curses were, in part, related to obedience and disobedience concerning idols. Refusing to participate in any kind of idol worship would result in blessing; participating in idol worship would result in curses, that is, in judgment.

Leviticus 26:1 <sup>11</sup>You shall not make for yourselves idols, nor shall you set up for yourselves an image or a sacred pillar, nor shall you place a figured stone in your land to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 26:30 <sup>30</sup>I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols, for My soul shall abhor you.

Deuteronomy 11:16–17 <sup>16</sup>“Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them. <sup>17</sup>“Or the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.

Deuteronomy 13 is a chapter devoted to imposing the death penalty on those who tried to seduce the Israelites into worshiping false gods. Whether it was prophets or dreamers, family members, or entire cities, all who seduced anyone into worshiping false gods was to be executed. History reveals they did not take that command seriously, and their non-feasance was very costly in terms of divine temporal disciplinary action being imposed on the nation for rebellion.

The book of Judges reveals the cycle of disobedience and punishment the nation suffered often as a result of rejecting Yahweh and turning to the worship of idols. The book simply says the Israelites “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” without specifying idolatry, but most of the time idolatry was the culprit whether it was an overt or a behind the scenes influence on the events of the time.

Judges 3:7–8 <sup>7</sup>The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. <sup>8</sup>Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.

The concept that sexual relations with cult prostitutes in order to influence the gods which then result in fertility, and therefore productivity, is a pagan concept called “sympathetic magic.” “Asherah was worshiped in various ways, including through ritual sex. Although she was believed to be Baal's mother, she was also his mistress. Pagans practiced ‘sympathetic magic’, that is, they believed they could influence the gods' actions by performing the behavior they wished the gods to demonstrate. Believing the sexual union of Baal and Asherah produced fertility, their worshipers engaged in immoral sex to cause the gods to join together, ensuring good harvests. This practice became the basis for

religious prostitution. The priest or a male member of the community represented Baal. The priestess or a female member of the community represented Asherah" [<https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/fertility-cults-of-canaan>, accessed 16 Feb. 2022].

The Israelites embraced the Canaanite fertility cults once they moved into the land at the end of the Exodus.

"They were rebellious and deceitful in that they practiced fertility worship and child sacrifice. They believed connection with nature, rather than a spiritual relationship with the Creator, would yield fertility. They also believed that sacrificing the next generation would guarantee the preservation of the present generation" [Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel, 4:166].

Isaiah 57:5 <sup>5</sup>Who inflame [מִמְהָר] yourselves among the oaks, Under every luxuriant tree, Who slaughter the children in the ravines, Under the clefts of the crags?

The Israelites were participating in the fertility rites that took place in the groves where pagan rituals were held in order to, in their thinking, ensure the fertility of their families, their crops, and their livestock. You can imagine the draw for this. Pagan men, operating according to the morality of a satanic world system, periodically visiting the groves and the high places to participate in sacred fertility rituals with sacred fertility ritual prostitutes in order to ensure that the gods looked upon them with favor in terms of children, crops, and livestock and operating according to pagan moral precepts would obviously be drawn to such worship practices. Not only men participated in these things. Pagan women who were not cult prostitutes also participated in this practice with at least pagan priests if not with other men there. Actually, some sources claim that women were the primary actors in these fertility rites.

Inflame, מִמְהָר, means to be warm, to become warm, to be made hot, burning with lust. In this verb form (Niphal participle) followed by אֲ [“in,” translated “among” in NASB], it means to burn with lust, as a prelude to sexual behaviors. The sense of the word is to feel strong lust.

Undoubtedly, due to the immoral, godless activities taking place in these groves of trees on the high places, the Israelites were commanded to destroy them when they entered Canaan to possess it. God, of course, knew that the exceedingly sinful practices of the fertility cults would constitute a tremendously strong temptation for the Israelites, which it did.

Numbers 33:52 <sup>52</sup>then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places;

The Israelites were commanded not to intermarry with people outside the covenant community. One unstated reason for that has to do with preserving a pure Hebrew bloodline for the accomplishment of God's purposes for history. In the immediate context of some

Scriptures, God commanded them not to intermarry with pagans because those pagan women would turn the hearts of their Israelite husbands to pagan gods.

Exodus 34:12–16 <sup>12</sup>“Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. <sup>13</sup>“But *rather*, you are to tear down their altars and smash their *sacred* pillars and cut down their Asherim <sup>14</sup>—for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God— <sup>15</sup>otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, <sup>16</sup>and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods.

Deuteronomy 7:3–6 <sup>3</sup>“Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. <sup>4</sup>“For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. <sup>5</sup>“But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their *sacred* pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. <sup>6</sup>“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Slaughtering the children refers to child sacrifice. Even Solomon, after violating God's command not to marry foreign, turned to pagan worship. The Scriptures indicate that he turned away, at least to some seriously deviant and rebellious extent, from Yahweh to embrace his wives' pagan gods.

1 Kings 11:1–8 <sup>1</sup>Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, <sup>2</sup>from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, “You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, *for* they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.” Solomon held fast to these in love. <sup>3</sup>He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. <sup>4</sup>For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father *had been*. <sup>5</sup>For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup>Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father *had done*. <sup>7</sup>Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. <sup>8</sup>Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

Chemosh and Molech were gods to whom people sacrificed their children. This Scripture does not say that Solomon actually participated in sacrificing his children. It does say that he built the facilities to do so, which was at the behest of his wives who “turned his heart away after other gods” (1 Kings 11:4). That strongly implies that his wives wanted to worship gods that demanded child sacrifice. It does not say that actually took place, but the implication is very strong that it did happen, and if it did happen, then some of Solomon's

children were sacrificed to Molech and Chemosh. If child sacrifice was not the intent, then why build those high places to Molech and Chemosh? Some theologians believe that Solomon's actions were motivated by politics since many of his wives were, in fact, wives of political expedience. The problem with that line of thought is that the Scriptures clearly relate his actions to matters of the heart, i.e., spiritual issues. His wives turned his heart to their pagan gods, and, at the same time, Solomon turned his heart away from Yahweh. Some Jewish sources also insist that Solomon did not build the high places while acting under the influence of his wives, but he only acquiesced in having them built. The text, however, says he built them, which means he ordered them built, because he would not physically build them himself either way [[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/4372130/jewish/The-Tragic-History-of-Molech-Child-Sacrifice.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4372130/jewish/The-Tragic-History-of-Molech-Child-Sacrifice.htm), accessed 18 Feb. 2022]. They probably would not have been built without his permission, but that is immaterial; the Scripture says he built them for his wives.

The other implication in all of this is that Solomon, later in life, took an active role in leading the people away from Yahweh and into idolatry. The king sets the example for the nation. Solomon is a perfect picture of one who started his faith walk well, and ended it poorly. The high places that Solomon built were in existence for about 300 years until Josiah, a godly king, had them destroyed. It took a godly king to undo what the formerly faithful King Solomon brought about by the end of his life.

2 Kings 23:13–14 <sup>13</sup>The high places which were before Jerusalem, which were on the right of the mount of destruction which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the sons of Ammon, the king [Josiah] defiled. <sup>14</sup>He broke in pieces the *sacred* pillars and cut down the Asherim and filled their places with human bones.

Solomon's actions were so serious that God tore much of Israel away from the Davidic line and He made Jeroboam king over the Northern Kingdom. The Davidic line remained on the throne in the Southern Kingdom.

1 Kings 11:31–33 <sup>31</sup>He said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give you ten tribes <sup>32</sup>(but he will have one tribe, for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel), <sup>33</sup>because they have forsaken Me, and have worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the sons of Ammon; and they have not walked in My ways, doing what is right in My sight and *observing* My statutes and My ordinances, as his father David *did*."

Clearly, by the time Isaiah wrote his book and by the time Babylon conquered the Southern Kingdom nearly 200 years later, the Israelites had not learned much from the early history of their nation in terms of idolatry.

Chemosh and Molech seem to be the same god who simply carry different names. This is somewhat important because Chemosh has no specific references to child sacrifice, but Molech does. In either case, the Israelites had no business worshiping them.



Chemosh, כְּמוֹשׁ, was the god of Moab with whom the people were so identified that they were called the “people of Chemosh” (Num. 21:29). He was called a “detestable idol” (1 Kings 11:7). The meaning of the name is uncertain, but may mean “subduer” or “destroyer.” He was described as a savage god of war. Chemosh may be linked to the Babylonian goddess Ishtar.

Molech, מֹלֵךְ, was the god of Ammon. This god was biblically linked to child sacrifice. The idol was forged such that a fire could be built within it into which a child was thrown into the flames. Others claim that the child was placed near the fiery hot idol to die from the extreme heat, placed into a chamber that had fire in it, or placed upon the arms of the god which were outstretched to accept the child and heated red hot to roast the child.

Some theologians deny that death was necessarily the result of what the Bible calls “passing through the fire.” Some thought a child was forced to jump over a fire built in a pit, while others thought that a brick walkway passed between fires on either side and the child was forced to walk the path between them

[\[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/4372130/jewish/The-Tragic-History-of-Molech-Child-Sacrifice.htm\]](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4372130/jewish/The-Tragic-History-of-Molech-Child-Sacrifice.htm), accessed 18 Feb. 2022].

Keil and Delitzsch believe both procedures were used by the Israelites. Before Ahaz they had their child sacrifices pass through the fire by walking between fires, and after Ahaz they killed the children as a true sacrifice to Molech.

“Ezekiel has the Moloch-worship in his eye in the form which it had assumed from the times of Ahaz downwards, when the people began to burn their children to Moloch, whereas all that can be proved to have been practiced in earlier times by the Israelites was the passing of children through fire without either slaying or burning; a februation by fire” [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, “Ezekiel” in *Commentary on the Old Testament: Ezekiel and Daniel*, vol. 9, 9:118-119].

There is ample evidence that child sacrifice took place at the time. Both Canaanite literary evidence and archaeological evidence in the form of children’s skeletons found at sacrificial sites verify the practice. Biblical evidence is overwhelming that child sacrifice occurred and that the Israelites participated in it.

2 Kings 23:10 <sup>10</sup>He [Josiah] also defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire for Molech.

The prophet Jeremiah confirmed not only the continuation of pagan worship in the high places from the time of Isaiah, but he also confirmed that the Israelites practiced child sacrifice there.

Jeremiah 7:31 <sup>31</sup>“They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind.

Ezekiel 16:20–21 <sup>20</sup>“Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed [זָבַח] them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? <sup>21</sup>“You slaughtered [טָהַרְשָׁה] My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through *the fire*.

Ezekiel's words, sacrifice and slaughter, prove beyond doubt that child sacrifice—sons and daughters—was taking place among the Israelites.

Sacrifice, זָבַח, means to slaughter for sacrifice referring to offering a sacrifice by killing a living thing as an act of worship, expiation, or propitiation to a deity. It also means to slaughter, to kill, and to offer. In its broadest sense, it refers to the slaughtering of animals. There is no doubt that Ezekiel is using this word to describe the Israelite practice of sacrificing their children as an offering to pagan gods.

Slaughter, טָהַרְשָׁה, means to slaughter or to kill by taking the life of a creature which implies that the object being killed offers little to no resistance as in a battle or a contest. The sense of the word as Ezekiel used it in this verse is to kill for sacrificial purposes.

“God called these innocent children His children. The abomination involved sacrificing sons and daughters alive, placing them in the red-hot altar to Molech, and burning them alive in the Kidron Valley. The altars built to honor Molech were small or large iron stoves, ornamented with the hands and arms of Molech. When the altars were heated red hot, children would be placed in those hands and burned alive as an offering to Molech, an act called ‘passing through the fire’. Child sacrifice is so abhorrent to the Lord, it is specifically forbidden” [Charles H. Dyer with Eva Rydelnik, “Ezekiel” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1226].

Constable suggested that the Israelites killed their children prior to burning them which, the way he worded these two verses, seems to be possible. “Evidently the idolaters first slew the children and then burned their dead bodies as sacrifices” [Thomas L. Constable, “Ezekiel” in *Thomas Constable’s Notes on the Bible, Volume IV, Isaiah-Daniel*, 425]. That is not the way the pagans conducted their child sacrifices. They sacrificed them in the flames alive, or in the idol’s red hot heated arms, and beat drums to drown out the screams. “The hollow bronze statue of Moloch was heated by fire, and the infant was placed in its heated arms, while drums were beaten to drown out the victim’s pitiful cries” [Merrill F. Unger, “Isaiah,” *Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1308].

This is a brief introduction or summary to Israel's idolatry problem that Isaiah is addressing in these verses. Idolatry was the most serious aspect of Israel's rebellion against Yahweh, and it was the primary factor behind God's decision to use Assyria to destroy the Northern Kingdom and Babylon to destroy the Southern Kingdom in terms of the imposition of His divine temporal disciplinary program.